



**United States
Department of
Agriculture**

**Forest
Service**

**White Mountain
National Forest
Androscoggin and
Evans Notch
Ranger Districts**

**300 Glen Road
Gorham, NH 03581-1399
Comm (603) 466-2713
TTD (603) 466-2856**

File Code: 1950 – Rocky Pond

Date: August 17, 2001

Dear Interested Citizen:

The Androscoggin District is proposing to designate, construct, re-construct, and partially locate on existing roads and trails, approximately 5 miles of snowmobile trail on National Forest lands in the Towns of Stark and Milan, New Hampshire (See Attached Map). The proposed trail project is a cooperative effort between local snowmobile clubs, the State of New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development – Bureau of Trails, and the White Mountain National Forest. It would provide motorized winter recreation opportunities consistent with the direction found in the White Mountain National Forest Land Management Plan (III-6). It would also meet objectives identified in the South Pond Opportunity Area (OA) analysis and the Kilkenney Unit Plan and Environmental Statement (II-63/G-10).

The primary purpose for this trail is to safely link the West Milan Trail and the City of Berlin (Corridor Trail NH19) to the Bell Hill Road Snowmobile Trail and the City of Groveton (Corridor Trail NH5). The trail would provide a key day loop route for the communities of Twin Mountain, Jefferson, Randolph, Gorham, Berlin, Milan, Stark, Groveton, Northumberland, and Lancaster. The proposed route provides a one-day loop trail with the amenities of community services such as food, fuel, and lodging that would benefit from snowmobile recreation use.

The White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (VII-A-55) identified the need to study this route and listed 1987 as the target year to begin that analysis. The Groveton Trailblazers and White Mountain Ridge Runners Snowmobile Clubs have indicated a strong demand for a designated snowmobile connector trail in this area for many years. The State of New Hampshire Bureau of Trails has expressed their support and interest in constructing and maintaining this important link between two corridor trails and many northern communities. The history of localized, traditional use of this area for snowmobile travel extends back to the nineteen sixties.

The proposed snowmobile trail would extend northwest from the current West Milan Trail onto Rocky Pond Road (Forest Development Road 460). The trail location would utilize the already established roadbed for approximately 3 miles. There would be no new construction required along this section. A damaged bridge that crosses Rocky Pond brook would require replacement. The original abutments are still in place, which will allow the bridge to be replaced without any streambed disturbance activity. The proposed route would then continue along Forest Development Road 460 to its terminus. The proposed route then follows existing skid trails, contouring to the north near Location Hill before connecting with an existing power line. The



proposed trail follows the power line to the northwest for approximately 1500 feet where it intersects with South Pond Road (Forest Road 765). After crossing the road, the proposed route would continue on an existing trail that follows an old town road accessing a series of skid roads. The trail follows the contours to the west before turning north toward Route 110. At State Route 110 the trail leaves National Forest lands. The New Hampshire Bureau of Trails has secured a highway crossing permit from the New Hampshire Department of Transportation over Route 110 at this location in 1982, Permit #TC1-1-82. Travel could then continue through state and private land north through the Nash Stream Forest or west to Groveton.

The trail would be located in Forest Plan Management Areas 3.1 and 2.1 which allow this type of motorized use. The trail location will primarily utilize existing improved roads, logging roads, and skid trails. Ground disturbance and crossing wet areas would be minimized, and all Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines to protect soil and water resources would be followed. Research of the Ecological Landtype (ELT) indicates that light reconstruction and trail construction work along this route is feasible with minimal impacts to the soil. ELT's associated with the trail are: 115A, 115C, and 115G. Little impact to soils and water is expected because the trail would be used under frozen-ground and snow-covered conditions.

The majority of the trail is located on terrain already suitable for snowmobiling. Most of the work needed to establish and maintain the trail corridor would consist of brushing the trail and some tree removal to bring the trail width up to prescribed specifications. There are several short sections that could require some minor excavation for the purpose of providing a level riding surface and improving drainage. On the descent toward Route 110, minor tree removal and grading will be required to widen and stabilize switchback turns down to the highway edge.

Any trail construction would be done in accordance with snowmobile trail design standards in Forest Service Handbook 2309.18 and the Memorandum of Understanding currently in effect between the Forest Service and the State of New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development (DRED). Both the Forest Service and a representative from DRED will work together on the project to ensure maximum resource protection and safety. A local snowmobile club, or DRED, or a combination of both would groom and maintain the trail. The trail would be patrolled by the Forest Service to ensure appropriate use.

A documented annual deer-yard exists in the vicinity of Rocky Pond and Location Hill near the proposed trail location. A report by Karl Strong on deer yard management in New Hampshire and Maine in 1977 estimated 5 to 20 deer wintered in the area. However, during the winters of 1992 and 1993 no sighting of deer or deer tracks were observed in the area. Over time, the forest has matured and gradually moved away from conditions that favor deer habitat and wintering areas. The Androscoggin Ranger District Wildlife Biologist indicates that the location of the potential route borders the deer wintering area and briefly enters it near the brook crossing. A field review of the wintering area was conducted on March 21, 1995, and determined that there would be minimal impacts to the area suggesting that the route be located on FR 460 or southwest of it, but not within the deer wintering area.

The District Biologist has also expressed some concern over the recent designation of potential Canada Lynx habitat within the planned route. If the trail were approved for snowmobile use, a possible result could involve closing a section of equal mileage on a snowmobile trail that is currently located in identified Lynx habitat as a mitigating measure.

National Forest Land comprises the majority of the route except at the east end of FR 460 where the Forest Service has acquired an unlimited Right OF Way (ROW) easement over this road. There are no land or title restrictions that would impede the location and future construction of the proposed segment. It is not in a municipal watershed, floodplain, or wetland. The area is not designated or near a Wilderness, Roadless Area, or Research Natural Area. A Cultural Resource Review of the entire segment has been completed and no indication of cultural resources were noted or observed during this on-site survey. The New Hampshire Natural Heritage Inventory (NHNHI) was contacted to determine the probability of sensitive plant species occurring with the area. Their database indicates no record of occurrences for sensitive plant species in this area.

Our initial analysis has revealed that no extraordinary circumstances are associated with this proposal that may individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Our further analysis will consider all environmental concerns and suggestions received from the public and input from resource specialists. When the environmental analysis is complete, I will decide whether or not to implement this project.

This type of project may be categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement under FSH 1909.15, Chapter 21.2-1 Construction and Reconstruction of Trails. Pursuant to 36 CFR 215, the decision cannot be appealed, so it is important that I hear from you. Copies of the Decision Memo will be mailed to people who submit comments before or during the comment period and to people who request copies of the Decision Memo.

To ensure that I have an opportunity to consider your comments before I make a final decision about this project, your comments must be postmarked or received by September 18, 2001. Please send your comments to George R. Pozzuto, District Ranger, Androscoggin Ranger District, 300 Glen Road, Gorham, NH 03581. Please be sure to include the following information.

Thank you for your interest in the White Mountain National Forest. For more information about this project, please call Pat Nasta, at (603) 466-2713 ext. #222.

Sincerely,

/s/ George R. Pozzuto

GEORGE R. POZZUTO
District Ranger